

# ***BURLINGTON HAWKEYE***

**Tuesday, March 29, 2005**

## **New opportunity Governor unveils promising new initiative to help bring new life to Iowa's communities.**

While being mindful that the burden to improve communities rests primarily with the community, a state– local initiative to do just that has some promise.

Iowa Gov. Tom Vilsack unveiled the plan, called Great Places, on Monday. He wants the Legislature to provide \$8 million to help finance it, and will target three communities across Iowa this year for pilot projects. In addition, there will be a series of regional meetings this year to discuss details of the programs and allow communities to bid for one of the three pilot openings.

Local civic officials should jump at the opportunity to compete for one of the three slots. Indeed, efforts to revitalize the Capitol Theater in downtown Burlington mirrors the example of the program, offered by Anita Walker, Iowa Cultural Affairs director. It calls for preserving and promoting communities and neighborhoods, attempting to tap the strengths of communities. Southeast Iowa has plenty that span the spectrum outlined in the Great Places model — historic, cultural, retail and housing among them.

Public money pumped into the community through the Vision Iowa program, coupled with the public– private investment in the Best Western waterpark complex now under construction, will breathe new life into the community.

Together those investments, along with other planned retail developments, will further solidify the county as a retail and tourism draw for this corner of the state. Meantime, Great River Health Systems is injecting millions of dollars into its already sprawling campus in West Burlington, providing more necessary health– care offerings for the region.

All together, the activity gives residents reason to be excited about the next several years.

While capitalizing on those projects, we should compete vigorously for resources under the governor's newest community–development initiative.

Burlington city officials are in the early stages of creating a vision for the community a decade from now.

If nothing else, the Great Places plan can piggy–back that effort to provide additional impetus for local leaders to map out a plan for the future that ensures vibrancy in the region.